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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON JOINT DRC-RWANDAN COMMUNIQUE

¶1. Rwandan media, taking their cue from senior GOR officials, have given positive coverage of the Nairobi Joint Communique on a common approach to end the threat posed to peace and security in the Great Lakes Region. On Monday, November 12, pro-government daily "New Times" ran under the headline "Congo agrees to FDLR disarmament plan" a review of the communique and commitments made by the DRC and Rwandan governments. The same day Foreign Minister Charles Murigande hosted a press conference for local media to discuss the communique. Under the headline "Congo committed to fight FDLR, the "New Times" on November 13 quoted Murigande as stating that a "new era" in Congolese-Rwandan relations was starting. Murigande reportedly went on to say that "In the (Nairobi) meeting I witnessed a change in attitude and language on the part of Congolese officials...a new era is starting in which DRC will not tolerate any of its officers to work with a force declared the enemy of the state." Murigande was, the story continued, optimistic that the Congolese government would rein in military officers accused of collaborating with the FDLR. News coverage on public and private radio stations, while more cursory, also reflected the Foreign Minister's upbeat assessment of the agreement. Murigande made similar comments during an interview with VOA's Francophone service broadcast on November 12.

¶2. The upbeat press coverage and comments by senior GOR officials following the Nairobi meeting are a decided contrast to media coverage during October of alleged DRC collusion with the FDLR and GOR dismissal of the DRC's draft plan for disarming the group. Throughout the month, the "New Times" provided extensive coverage to allegations of official DRC-FDLR collusion, including interviews with FDLR soldiers allegedly captured by Congolese rebel general Laurent Nkunda during fighting with FARDC units, and human rights abuses allegedly committed by the FARDC, FDLR, and other rebel groups. The paper also carried an op-ed by Rwandan Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region, Ambassador Richard Sezibera, on collaboration between the FARDC and FDLR.

¶3. Comment: The GOR's strong public support for the Nairobi agreement and praise for the DRC's changed attitude appears to reflect an effort by the GOR to meet its commitment to publicize the contents of the joint communique and to refrain from any negative propaganda against the DRC. End comment.  
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